

Regarding Tamil fishermen languishing in various jails of Sri Lanka

SHRI T. M. SELVAGANAPATHI (SALEM): Thank you, hon. Chairperson, for giving me this opportunity. This is a very important survival issue of the Tamil fishermen in Tamil Nadu.

Madam, there are almost 87 fishermen who are languishing in various jails of Sri Lanka. ? *(Interruptions)* There are about 175 boats which were captured by the Sri Lankan Navy. The boats have been kept for years together in the Sri Lankan land. ? *(Interruptions)*

Madam, on August 1st, to all our surprise, our Tamil fishermen were attacked brutally by the Sri Lankan Navy and the boats got capsized which is never in the order. There is an international agreement. This criminality of the Sri Lankan Navy has to be taken note of by the Government of India.

Our hon. dynamic Chief Minister has been, time and again, writing to the Government of India, detailing about the plight of the Tamil fishermen and the problem they face with the Indian Army.

Madam, I would like to draw the attention of the Government towards a fact that there is a strong presence of the Indian Coast Guard and the Indian Navy, the headquarters of which is at Madras. What are they doing? They have become silent spectators. They do not come into action when they know the fishermen are being attacked. Time and again, the hon. Chief Minister has been writing to the Government of India but in vain.

Madam, I would like to point out that there was a sovereign agreement in the year 1974 between India and Sri Lanka providing a right to dry the net in Katchatheevu, which means right to fish was also allowed as per the international agreement. But in 1976, two Joint Secretaries of the Government had absolutely turned over the sovereign agreement entered into between the two countries and removed the clause of right to dry the net in Katchatheevu. This is the problem now. This is because of which they are going to the extent of killing the Indian fishermen. So, I want to draw the attention of the Government that there must be a diplomatic effort by the Government. The Government should form a committee consisting of the representatives of the fishermen, who should visit the jails where these

fishermen are kept. There are reports that they have been brutally attacked time and again, and their boats are being damaged. These boats are often released only after six or seven years.

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Please conclude.

SHRI T. M. SELVAGANAPATHI: Madam, this is a serious issue which the Government of India should take up. Today, the External Affairs Minister is going to give a Statement in the House in the afternoon. I would request him to address and respond to this issue also.

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Please conclude.

SHRI T. M. SELVAGANAPATHI: Madam, a committee should be formed, which would visit Sri Lanka and meet the Indian fishermen. After all they are contributing to the nation's wealth. Seven to eight percent of the wealth is generated by them through export. So, it is a very serious issue which the Government should immediately take into account. Thank you.